

National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities

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Equipping yourself for the long haul

The Supreme Court's recent slew of rulings rolling back vital equity mechanisms such as affirmative action, LGBTQ equal rights protections, and student loan forgiveness make two things abundantly clear. First, we are experiencing a retrenchment of human and civil rights on a scale we've not seen in decades. Second, this retrenchment portends a devastatingly long period ahead of organizing, advocacy and systems change to regain full momentum toward a more equitable society.

Many writers and commentators provide valuable analysis of the moment and translate the rage and despair that many of us feel into clear statements of insight and determination. I call your attention, for example, to the statements by [Kimberlé Crenshaw](#), law professor at Columbia University and University of California – Los Angeles, and [Darren Walker](#), president of the Ford Foundation.

What does this mean on a practical level for each of us? What are the specific

implications for our individual antiracist journeys? What steps should we each take tomorrow? The next day?

One key immediate step is to bolster our personal readiness to **stay the course for the long haul**. How can we keep pushing through the exhaustion and natural cynicism of what will feel like two steps forward/three steps back for the foreseeable future?

Each of us will need personal support and trusted accountability to stay the course effectively. One mechanism I have been recommending to antiracist change agents for some time now is a Racial Equity Buddy. It is very, very hard to stay the course alone—when staying the course means constant learning and growth, constant vigilance to check our biases and those of others, and unyielding efforts to promote inclusion and belonging whenever possible.

People: Don't go it alone!

Many of us have figured out that the only way we will stick to our workout routine, walking regimen or healthy diet is to engage a workout buddy, walking buddy or nutrition buddy. Well, my friends, it's time to add a Racial Equity Buddy to your support network.

With a Racial Equity Buddy, your antiracism journey will have more focus, consistency, support, revelation, accountability and fulfillment.

My tips for selecting a Racial Equity Buddy (or two):

- A Racial Equity Buddy can be of the same or a different racial/ethnic background as long as they are on their own antiracist journey.
- Key characteristics of a Racial Equity Buddy include a good listener, a lifelong learner, high integrity and discretion, a willingness to change their opinions, and a tough skin.
- Take your time finding the right Racial Equity Buddy; you might have many racial equity friends but just one or two Racial Equity Buddies.
- Focus on building trust and establishing a safe relationship space where you can be honest and vulnerable.
- Share, but don't lecture; listen with empathy not skepticism; be curious not argumentative.
- Be flexible and accommodating; like all journeys, yours will take unexpected twists and turns.

- Savor the journey. Don't rush, keep steady momentum and have fun—even as you delve into painful and difficult topics, like the last week we have all experienced.

Forest Hill Presbyterian Church in Cleveland has had a wonderfully successful Racial Equity Buddy initiative for the last four years, spearheaded by the indomitable Quentin Smith, a cherished friend who heard my recommendation and ran with it. Recently, I joined a group of about 10 pairs of buddies and another 20 buddy-seekers at Forest Hill as we watched and discussed *I Am Not Your Negro*, the scintillating documentary featuring the writings and commentary of James Baldwin. So many of Baldwin's pronouncements on race 50 years ago are eerily relevant today.

"History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history." This is a compelling lens to consider the Supreme Court's actions last week, rolling America backward into its history. Our history is with us indeed.

So, what next?

Invite someone in your social network to join you in meaningful conversations about the recent Supreme Court rulings. Set a time for an initial conversation, discuss your reactions, feelings and fears, and then name something you can do together. What could you listen to, read or watch to learn more and discuss together? Ask yourselves what it means to equip yourselves for the long haul and how you can support each other.

I guarantee you will rebound more effectively from gut punches like the recent Supreme Court decisions when you have a Racial Equity Buddy to turn to.

Onward!

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